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To: Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns
Subject: Comments for Farm Bill Forums

Hope Springs Eternal

2005 Johanns and other USDA officials continue Farm Bill listening tour. [1] (see References) The public is invited to attend and

offer comments on farm bill policy. This letter contains my comments.

2001 "Stemming the Tide - Great Plains Symposium offers hope," by Justin Welk [2]. My comments on this symposium are contained in the attachment Soccer Moms.

1998 "A Time to Act" A report of the USDA National Commission on Small Farms Misc. Publication 1545 (MP-1545) [3]. My comment: a gaggle of barely important people so politically correct that

they give us a bucketful of sawdust instead of a solid plank upon which to venture into the future.

Globalization

(Threats to American Agriculture, Steven C. Blank) [4] In general, it appears that if markets are allowed to work and individual and global investment decisions are made, production agriculture in America will continue its gradual disappearance. An increasingly urban America has tired of subsidizing our farmers and ranchers. Agriculture is losing its appeal as an investment for our nation. ... everything that is happening in this development of a global market is good for U. S. agribusiness firms and American consumers. ... Politicians do not want to change that. ... Unfortunately, there are less than 2 million American producers and they can no longer win any political battles against the 260 million consumers of the cheap food being provided by the global market."

The First Law of Globalization (FLOG) - forget friendship if

you can make a buck. The Second Law of Globalization (SLOG) - let the people eat investments when they run out of food.

Thomas Friedman, sometimes called the godfather of globalization, gives us "The Lexus and the Olive Tree." [5] Friedman thinks the Lexus, and what it stands for, is the wave of the future. I greatly admire Toyota, developer and manufacturer of the Lexus [see attachment The Case], but I believe the olive tree will win in the long run (see drawings of the Mayan ruins before the jungle was cleared away and of the Angkor Wat ruins before being cleared of jungle growth). The power of plants comes as a shock to those who rarely set their boots on soil. My prediction: Friedman's "electronic herd" gets run over by a grove of olive trees.

A flaw remains in humans - the lust for World Domination. Yesterday, the lust took the form of Manifest Destiny, where One Nation under God displaced many nations under many gods. Today, it takes the form of Globalization. Eventually, "The World is Not Enough." The sentiment of this movie title is the endpoint of every globalist's dream.

The Indians with many nations and many gods may yet have the last laugh. They survived 10,000 years. We arrived 500 years ago and are struggling.

Problems

(Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Clyde Prestowitz) [6] "In its current form and mode of operation, globalization is ultimately unsustainable and is presently

undermining long term U.S. welfare and power. ... a true leader strives to discover the facts, connect the dots, follow where they lead,

and determine how best to face the problem they present ... a unique

opportunity for a still powerful America to turn from illusions of empire and exercise the ingenious entrepreneurial leadership that has long characterized it."

("Guestworker Programs: A Threat to American Agriculture," Mark Krikorian) [7] "By artificially inflating the supply of labor, an agricultural guestworker program keeps the price of labor low and reduces incentives for harvest mechanization and technological advancement in fruit and vegetable production. ... Competing with low-wage countries on the basis of labor costs is a dead end - no modern

society will ever be willing to reduce farmworkers' wages enough to match those paid in third world countries. ... There is little doubt

that fruit and vegetable production could survive, and thrive, without importing foreign workers, whether illegals or guestworkers. ... There is also the danger that the slowing of innovation caused by foreign labor will allow our economic competitors in other developed countries to leap ahead of us. ... Helping agriculture disentangle itself from foreign labor would strengthen the competitive position of America's farmers, avoid burdening taxpayers with huge new liabilities, and lighten the load of those who continue to toil in the fields."

("Farm Bill Follies of 1990," James Bovard) [8] "Congress is

in the process of legislating another five years of subsidies for farmers. Taxpayers will probably be forced to pay another \$100 billion or more in farm aid, and consumers will pay another \$50 billion or more in higher food prices if Congress extends existing subsidy programs another five years. That will mean spending the equivalent of more than \$400,000 for every full-time farmer in the United States."

Mechanization

("Alternatives to Immigrant Labor?," Sarig, Thompson, and Brown) [9] "Although hand harvesting is still practiced widely in the United States, those fruit and vegetable growers who are dependent on hand harvesting are now facing two significant problems that could very well determine the future of their business - availability of labor and price competitiveness in the world markets. ... (it is) commonly accepted...that relegating man to the status of work animal is not a socially acceptable practice. ... There is almost a worldwide consensus that competitiveness is crucial to maintaining our agricultural industry. New technologies and mechanization appear to offer the only solution to significantly reduce production costs and maintain competitiveness. ... Maintaining the status quo for several

more years will not be in the best interests of U. S. growers, workers, or consumers."

("In the service of abundance," John K. Schueller) [10] "At the start of the 20th century a U.S. farmer fed about 2 ½ people. Today,

that farmer feeds 97 Americans and 32 living abroad. ...
Agricultural mechanization has always been a political-social issue.
Increasing farm consolidation has made many farmers and farm employees
redundant, and has decimated some rural towns. ... The area of the
greatest contemporary excitement and growth is what goes by the poorly
chosen term of 'precision agriculture.' Mechanization has caused farmers

to lose their ability to treat each animal or small area within a field
individually. The record-keeping capability of computers allows that
ability to be recovered. ... the possibility of replacing large
tractors, which can compact the soil, with small, lightweight robots
can't be effectively evaluated until such robots are designed."

Robots in agriculture? (see attachment Robots)

Is agricultural mechanization really of great benefit to a
country? Look at the graphs of Percentage of Population in Agriculture
(see attachment Give Us This Day) and note the correlation of rich
countries with low percentage-of-population in agriculture.

A theorist might conclude that if rich countries have low
percentages of their populations in agriculture, then the richest
country would have zero population in agriculture. Good sense and an
education do not always arrive in the same basket.

Consequences

Few books stand the test of time. One such is Silent Spring
by Rachel Carson [11]. We buy our abundance of food at a cost, one of
which is chemical contamination.

Recently, another book was published, Fatal Harvest by
Andrew Kimbrell [12], which pointed out other dangers, such as genetic
contamination. In time, it may become as well known as Silent Spring.

Readers who still have some positiveness left after reading
Spring and Harvest may wish to read Eating Fossil Fuels by Dale Allen
Pfeiffer [13]. An Author's Note states: This is possibly the most
important article I have written to date. It is certainly the most
frightening, and the conclusion is the bleakest I have ever penned. This

article is likely to greatly disturb the reader; it has certainly
disturbed me. However, it is important for our future that this paper
should be read, acknowledged and discussed.

When people are hard pressed, they sometimes turn to magic.
Such seems to be the case with ethanol. An agricultural system has been
devised in which more energy comes out than is put in. Pimentel and
Patzek [14] popped that bubble by pointing out that in the real world,
the energy produced from ethanol does not equal the energy expended in
producing the ethanol, again confirming the First Law of Thermodynamics.

One reason Indians survived 10,000 years is that they ate
corn, they didn't burn it.

Whither?

(The 20th Century Transformation of U.S. Agriculture and
Farm Policy, ERS-USDA) [15] Early 20th century agriculture was labor
intensive, and it took place on a large number of small, diversified
farms in rural areas where more than half of the U.S. population lived.
These farms employed close to half of the U.S. workforce, along with 22
million work animals, and produced an average of five different
commodities.

The agricultural sector of the 21st century, on the other
hand, is concentrated on a small number of large, specialized farms in
rural areas where less than a fourth of the U.S. population lives. These

highly productive and mechanized farms employ a tiny share of U.S.

workers and use 5 million tractors in place of the horses and mules of earlier days.

Early in the history of the Soviet Union, Stalin made the statement: "Agriculture is developing slowly, comrades. This is because we have about 25 million individually owned farms. These are the most primitive and underdeveloped form of economy. We must do our utmost to develop large farms and to convert them into grain factories for the country organized on modern scientific basis." [16]

Whether small farms are destroyed by Capitalism or Communism, the result is the same - the accelerated decline of that Society.

(Don't be Down on the Farm, Senator Byron Dorgan) [17] A traveler through Western Europe these days observes something unusual to

American eyes. Family-based agriculture is thriving there. The countryside is dotted with small, prosperous farms, and the communities these support are generally prosperous as well. The reason, of course, is that Europe encourages its family-scale agriculture, while America basically doesn't care. The difference was apparent at the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle. The European representatives were talking about families and communities, while the Americans talked about

markets.

(Growing Small Farms: Promoting Sustainable and Organic Agriculture. Website created and maintained by Debbie Roos, Agricultural

Extension Agent, North Carolina Cooperative Extension.) [18] " ... the Chatham County landscape is dotted with small farms. Farmers throughout the county are known for growing a great diversity of agricultural products, including vegetables, fruits, cut flowers, herbs,

poultry, beef, pork, dairy products, and other goods. As one of the few counties in the state to actually experience an increase in the number of farms in the past decade, Chatham is also 'growing small farms.'

"... In a time when the trend in conventional agriculture is towards fewer and larger farms and many of North Carolina's "conventional" farmers are struggling, the sustainable and diverse agriculture practiced by Chatham's small farms provides the best hope for keeping agriculture a viable part of the community."

How can the USDA help American agriculture? I suggest two simultaneous policies:

1. Help promote small family farms, probably on a County

by County basis, and

2. Help develop small, smart, economical, robotic-type agricultural machines, probably on a State by State basis.

The Gathering Storm

In The Gathering Storm [19], Winston Churchill wrote his version of events preceding WWII. There is at present a gathering storm

in American agriculture, a storm which will decide how small family farms will survive while large agribusiness firms are on the prowl.

There are reasons to be hopeful, "Historically, large, complex civilizations have existed for a fraction of the time of simpler agricultural communities ... any human society is a house of cards. The more complex that society is - numbers of people, communication links,

socio-economic levels, trade networks, income sources, resource needs, etc. - the higher the house, and the more cards that can collapse. Looked at in this way, modern societies are not more robust and strong than less developed, simpler communities, but in fact are more vulnerable, requiring far more care and attention. ... it took about 72 hours for a reasonably functional, high-tech, well-educated, urbane, globalised, wired and well-resourced population in the world's richest nation to unravel and start behaving like a roving primate troop." [20]

The dinosaurs that roamed our fields were in their last days.

And after such a brief time. But, machines evolve in centuries, not millions of years. The dinosaurs showed no mercy as they pushed mules and horses aside. They channeled human rivers this way and that, heedless of the consequences. They made landscapes uniform and monotonous so they could eat and disgorge easily.

Their match came finally from small, smart, fast, and flexible mechanisms that overwhelmed them in numbers. These busy little machines nibbled away at the monocultures, turning them into mosaics of diversity. They floated species into and out of landscapes with a nimbleness that the dinosaurs could not understand, let alone cope with.

As uniformity disappeared, the dinosaurs fell - one by one - inexorably.

Eventually, all of them were gone except for a very few that were kept in protected niches for public viewing. (see attachment Give Us This Day)

References: (see attachment References)

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